Communication Skills in Islamic Perspective

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Abstract:
Living together is the natural instinct of human beings, who rely on communication for fulfilling their needs and conveying their feelings. A lively and peaceful life depends on effective communication which minimizes the chances of conflict. Whereas, ineffective communication leads to create ambiguities, misunderstandings and conflicts. Being a complete code of life, Islam provides the required guidelines for effective communication. The verses of the Holy Quran and Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) highlight this topic. Similarly, the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the practical example of effective communication. The current paper deals with the topic of effective communication in the light of Islamic teachings.
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Introduction:

Transfer of thoughts, feelings and sensations to others is called "communication". According to Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary, communication is "the activity or process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information".[1] It is also defined as "social intercourse".[2] The BBC English Dictionary provides more comprehensive definition "Communication is the activity or process of giving information to other people or living things".[3] Interestingly, communication is not confined to humans rather it is also found in animals, birds and insects, which can be observed in daily life. However, being the selected and virtuous creature of God, humans use various means of communication as compared to other creatures. The current technological development has enhanced the ways and means of communication.

Cohabitation is inherited in the nature of humans. They need to communicate in every day's life in order to fulfill their requirements, wills and desires. In the same way, feelings and thoughts of others are known through communication. In

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social life, the necessities and desires of humans are fulfilled in the best manner when these are communicated effectively. Hence, our routine life moves smoothly because of exchange of views and information through communication. Now, we explore the role of communication in creation and eradication of conflicts. Just imagine two houses, in one house a joint family system, where all family members have their breakfast, lunch and dinner together and share their feelings with one another. In such situations, the parents can guide and advise their children in a soft and polite manner. While in a second house, the family lives jointly but each member has its own world, they do not share their feelings and problems with one another. Hence, the parents advise their children rarely or harshly and fear prevails in the environment of the house. We have to determine which family can live with peace and tranquility. The answer will definitely be the first house where better communication is carried out between members of the family. Similar is the case in our daily life, bad communication leads to conflicts and good communication resolves conflicts and leads to peace and harmony. This example proves that effective communication is direly needed to keep the environment of the society peaceful, nonviolent and harmonized.

The Holy Quran directs its followers for effective communication skills in the following verses:

a. "*Invite people to the way of your Lord with wisdom and counsel. And argue with them in the best of manners*"[4]
b. *"So (Prophet) it is through mercy from Allah that you are gentle to them. Had you been rough and hard-hearted they would have from around you. So, pardon them and seek forgiveness for them*"[5]
c. *"Good and evil are not equal. Repel evil with what is best and you will see the one you had mutual enmity with him will turn as if he were a close friend"*[6]

Types of Communication:

Basically, there are two types of communication i.e. (I). Verbal communication (II). Non-verbal communication, they are explained as follow:

I. Verbal communication: In this type of communication, we present our thoughts, emotions, wills and wishes through conversation and speaking. The Holy Quran mentions this type of communication in the following verses:

a. "*And my brother Haroon is more eloquent than me in speech; so, send him with me as helper to bear me out. I am afraid they will give lie to me*"[7]
b. "*We did not send any messenger but (speaking) in the language of his people, so that he might clearly convey message to them"*[8]

This is the easiest and simplest mode of communication. If we fail to represents our thoughts effectively, it will result into miscomprehension and the listener will ignore the importance of our conversation. Sometimes due to this

miscomprehension or defective communication conflicts arise between parties/ individuals.

ii. Non-verbal communication:

In our daily life we frequently present our emotions, feelings and thoughts without speaking, through gestures and various body organs e.g. movements of head, hands, arms, eyes, eye's brow etc. This type of communication is also found in the life of the Prophet (PBUH) as his companions used to know his anger, unwillingness and disapproval from his cheeks, eyes and colour of the face. Similarly, the third type of Hadith which is known as "*Hadith Taqreeri*" is justified from the quietness and positive gestures of the Prophet (PBUH). In our daily routine life, we answer many questions through movements of head or face. Similarly, we use our hands for giving various signals. Undoubtedly, the combination of both verbal and non-verbal communication makes our discussion or speech lively and effective.

Principles of effective communication:

It is a fact that intelligence, money and reputation are the globally accepted symbols, however, if anyone does not possess the art of effective and inspiring communication, he cannot win the heart of many peoples. Only such a man can inspire the minds and hearts of other people who know the art of situational usage of words and sentences, who respects listener can encourage and appreciate the deeds and feelings of others. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) says "some speeches have a magical inspiration".[9]

The man who has a quality of inspirational discussion, people long for his company, many problems are solved due to his words, and many obstacles are covered without using force. A renowned thinker and poet *Sheikh Saadi* (d. 691 H) is of the view that we can pull an elephant with a single hair by using the suitable and sweet words. Therefore, it is important to keep a vigil eye on one's mode of discussion and selection of words. Following are the important principles of effective communication:

1. **Soft tone:** Islam underlines the importance of manner and etiquettes and one of them is the soft tune. The Holy Prophet (SAW) has been reported to say:

> "*Allah Almighty is kind, loves kindness and awards such reward on the basis of kindness which he does not award on harshness nor on anything else"*.[10]

The use of harsh tone in communication makes the listeners uncomfortable. Even, if someone uses the harsh manner in speech, Muslims are directed to ignore this and reciprocate in a soft mode. The Almighty God, advised Hazrat Musa and Hazrat Haroon (AS) while sending them for preaching to the Pharaoh (the king of Egypt who claimed to be a god and whose intensions were known to Almighty Allah for not accepting the preaching):

> "*And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear [Allah]"*[11]

While speaking to a rival, one must keep it in mind that he is not better in position from Hazrat Haroon and Hazrat Musa (AS) and our rival is not worse than position of Pharaoh.

2. Selection of suitable words:

For effective communication, the selection of suitable words, phrases and sentences is direly important, otherwise, we would not be able to communicate our thoughts and intensions in an understandable manner. A common proverb “think before you speak” narrates the significance of the selection of suitable words. In other words, we can say that there should be a good combination between our thoughts and words. It is commendable to select easy and graspable words. *Hazrat Ali (RA)* advises speaking according to the mind level of listener. Some people use complicated rare or out dated words in order to inspire others or just to satisfy their inner self. These words, most commonly, remain beyond the comprehension of the listener. This situation causes a negative impact and listeners lose their interest in the discussion resulting in the failure of desired objectives of communication.

3. Low Voice:

Generally loud voice causes nuisance and irritation among the listeners e.g. frequent use of loud speakers and amplifiers. Nowadays, loud voice and noises are considered a kind of pollution affecting environment. Naturally, Allah has gifted human beings with a voice which can be made as loud or low as per demand of situation. Therefore, a suitable volume of voice should be selected according to the number of listeners. The Holy Quran describes the advice of *Hazrat Luqman* (A.S) to his son: “*And lower your voice. Surely, the ugliest of voices is the voice of donkeys*”.[12]

4. Mental level of the listener:

A speaker should know that all people are of different natures and their mental level differ from each other. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) used to take care of this while advising others. Similarly, *Hazrat Abdullah bin Mas’ūd* (RA) said:

> “*It is the case that you do not relate to the people a narration which their minds cannot grasp except that it becomes a cause of chaos for some of them*’.[13]

Modern science supports this idea in terms of I.Q. (Intelligence Quotient) that all people or listeners cannot be same in terms of I.Q because they differ largely from each other in grasping and digestion of a topic.

5. Situational awareness:

One of key principle of effective communication is taking care of the situational demands. Avoiding this principle can lessen the efficacy of our discussion. For example, at the time of wedding, talking about death anniversaries or mourning can lead to undesirable results. Same principle should be kept in mind while discussing a serious topic or just chatting with friends. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) was asked by a companion “which of the worships is the

best?" He replied "offering of *Salah* (prayer) at accurate time. When another companion asked the same question, he replied "doing jihad in the way of Allah". The variety of answers shows the caring of the situation because both questioners had different backgrounds and the Prophet (PBUH) answered accordingly.

6. Avoiding one-sided approach of communication:

The unilateral mode of communication in discussion is considered an unpleasant act in which speaker dominates the discussion and does not allow others to interfere. Generally, listeners and participants get bored and lose their interest in such situation. Similarly, feelings of opposition rivalry are promoted due to this attitude. The God has blessed humans with single tongue and couples of ears which gives the message of speaking and listening in a balanced way. Therefore, the wise people always advise to listen to others and complete the speech in short time, comprehensively. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) advised Hazrat Ali (RA): *"when two men come to you seeking judgment, do not judge for the first until you have heard the statement of the other. Soon you will know how to judge".*[14]

7. Avoiding reproaches in discussion:

Some people, considering themselves as "straight forward and bold", speak brazenly before others without caring for the feelings and emotions of them. This kind of attitude hurts their souls and minds, in addition to the lowering to the prestige of the speaker. When a certain person is asked to change his mind set harshly or critically, he usually considers it as attack on his self-respect, however, he may change his point of view if asked in a proper respectful way. The Holy Quran advises us to keep in mind the following principle: *"Do not revile those whom they invoke other than Allah, lest they should revile Allah in transgression without having knowledge".*[15]

There are many things in our normal differences which can be settled down but they need mutual understanding, tolerance and reconciliation.

Principles of effective non-verbal communication:

Nonverbal communication also plays an active role in our day to day life. It has been guessed that 2/3 of our daily communication are based on non-verbal gestures and signals.

For example, if we listen to two persons, where one is speaking on mobile phone without seeing him and the second one speaking before us physically, we will comprehend the message of the latter one in a better way than the former one because we have the opportunity of seeing his body language and gestures in addition to his speaking. Hence, non-verbal communication makes the conversation effective, durable and easily understandable, therefore, it cannot be avoided in our daily life and one should be careful in using various gestures of non-verbal communication.

In the following, significant rules of non-verbal communication have been elaborated.

1. Gaiety and cheerfulness:

Generally, when someone feels pleasure on meeting a certain person, the effects of happiness appear on the former's face. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) says, "*Do not consider any act of goodness as being insignificant even if it is meeting your brother with a cheerful face*".[16] In another hadith of the Prophet (PBUH), meeting a brother with smile is declared an act of charity.[17] Hence, cheerfulness is considered as an act of goodness which will be rewarded by Almighty Allah. Similarly, the expressions of dullness appear when someone meets an undesirable person. The facial expressions of a person speak about his inner feelings. Therefore, the facial gestures of a person should be pleasant while speaking to someone in order to convey a constructive message of warm emotions. Certainly, if someone feels that speaker does not have good feelings for him, the conversation will not be effective. In the same way, if someone feels that the other has sympathy and good feelings for him, the objective of conversation will be achieved. The Holy Quran describes the advice of *Hazrat Luqman* (AS) to his son: "*And do not turn your cheeks away from people and do not walk on the earth haughtily. Surely, Allah does not like anyone who is arrogant, proud".*[18]

2. The role of eyes in non-verbal communication:

Our body organs play a significant role in our daily conversation. One of these organs is eyes, which are used for the interpretation of various feelings. It is a common maxim that "eyes also speak" because our inner feelings are very easily conveyed through eyes. Eyes convey message of love, anger, jealousy, approval and disapproval, therefore, while using eyes in conversation, we should be careful in their usage. In a long hadith, which narrates the incident of "Conquer of Makkah" the companions of Prophet (PBUH) wished that the Prophet (PBUH) would have blinked his eye in order to kill the man who was standing before him for allegiance, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) responded: "*it is not advisable for a Prophet to play deceptive tricks with the eyes*".[19]

We should not stare continually at someone as this gives an awful impression. It has been practiced generally, when someone talks and audience do not pay heed to him, the speaker complains about this because the speaker guesses the attention of audience through their eyes' contact. Therefore, we should focus our eyes on listeners when communicating a message.

3. Use of hands:

Suitable movements of hands during conversation adds effectiveness, therefore, while addressing people, appropriate signaling by hands should be done according to the need of situation. However, the speaker should be careful in usage of hands otherwise they will convey message of emotional outburst. In the past, people used to carry weapons in hand and they used them for pointing and signaling. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) forbade people from doing this: *"None of you should point out towards his Muslim brother with a weapon, for he does*

not know, Satan (Devil) may tempt him to hit him and thus he would fall into a pit of (Hell) fire".[20]

Similarly, the use of fingers for various signs should be made with caution in order to avoid any unpleasant message.

Conclusion:

No one can live separately in the present world situation. Historically, man is dependent upon to others' support for survival and living. In the same way, a state cannot live without dependency on other states in order to fulfill its needs and requirements. At present, the world has been shrunk into a village due to tremendous technological and scientific advancement. Hence communication between people living in far-flung areas has become possible. The communication is the sole mean of interaction among people. In daily life, we observe that effective communication lessens the chance of clashes and conflicts and leads to a peaceful environment. While on the other hand ineffective communication disturbs peace and leads to conflicts. The religion of Islam has provided complete guidance and advice for effective communication prior to the realization of its significance by the present world. Islamic teachings regarding effective communication possess full capacity to make this world nonviolent and peaceful.

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